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Mr Marc Shoffren
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shoffren

Short inspection of Alma Primary

Following my visit to the school on 21 May 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Leaders have effectively addressed the key issues found at the time of the last inspection. Teachers now follow the school's assessment policy consistently to provide pupils with high-quality feedback about their work. They make sure that the work is suitably challenging. Middle leaders are more established in their roles and are clear about their responsibilities. Under your purposeful and reflective leadership, the annual self-evaluation process identifies the right priorities to support continuous improvement.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is underpinned by clear values. Leaders, staff and governors share a common purpose for supporting pupils' progress and helping them to become well rounded citizens. Pupils learn to be kind and respect others even when they do not always agree with them. The curriculum is entirely focused on pupils learning more and knowing more as they move through the school. The strong curriculum is supporting your aim of being '...among the highest performing primary schools in the borough'.

Leaders challenge and support teachers to improve their practice. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching throughout the school. Teachers and support staff value the opportunities to improve their practice through interesting and varied professional development. Staff appreciate the time leaders take to listen to their ideas and concerns. All staff who responded to the survey said that they were proud to be part of the school.

Leaders and teachers want the best for all pupils. They expect them to make strong progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders and teachers work together with parents and carers to identify any barriers to pupils' learning. They ensure that pupils who require additional support receive this in a timely way. Teachers make sure that lessons are appropriately challenging for all pupils. From broadly average starting points, pupils' outcomes at the end of all key stages are securely above those found nationally.

This is a rapidly growing school. Its expansion requires leaders to periodically take stock of the allocation of roles and responsibilities. Recent appointments have added much-needed capacity and significant expertise to the leadership team. This work in progress is proving effective in improving the quality of provision and supporting pupils' strong progress.

Governors bring extensive knowledge and experience to their role, particularly in matters relating to pupils' well-being and their educational achievement. Through challenging and supporting leaders to secure improvement, they have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. A recently commissioned audit highlights their determination to govern efficiently and effectively.

The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey would recommend the school. Parents value the support and care given to their children. One parent wrote, 'My child feels happy and safe', a message which echoes that of many others. Another wrote, 'Our children have developed a real passion for learning and cannot wait to get to school each day.' The school's higher-than-average attendance rates together with no exclusions support parents' typically positive and affirming views.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have successfully embedded a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff welcome your weekly challenge, testing their knowledge of current guidance and best practice. Staff know that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. They are familiar with and make appropriate use of all the relevant systems and processes.

The introduction of a nurture group has added further strength to safeguarding practice. As part of this group, pupils receive timely support for mental health and well-being. Pupils and their parents feel that the school is safe. Pupils know that they can speak to any adult if they have a worry or a concern. They told me that

bullying rarely happens and if it does, adults deal with it. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when they are using the internet.

Strong partnerships with external agencies support leaders' safeguarding work. Leaders work effectively with other professionals to make sure that pupils who are vulnerable receive the help they need.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to focus on three aspects of the school's work. Firstly, we looked at the actions leaders take to enable all pupils to make strong progress. This was because at the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment has been above the national average in all subjects, including at greater depth.
- Leaders provide an effective education that takes account of pupils' different starting points on entry to the school. From the very beginning, leaders get to know pupils well. Through home visits, effective liaison with local nurseries and well-planned induction, they identify children's learning needs shortly before or soon after they begin school in the Reception Year.
- Teachers plan carefully for individual pupils, providing additional support or challenge where needed. They make excellent use of the resources available to enrich lessons, develop good learning behaviours and provide memorable learning experiences. Strong teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants adds to the quality of education provided.
- Leaders are reflective. They use self-evaluation to find out what is working well and what needs to change. The recent focus on improving the quality of feedback to pupils has been highly successful. Pupils respond well to comments from their teachers and use these to help them to improve.
- Leaders proactively seek external advice and support to improve educational practice further. However, there is plenty of strong practice within the school from which to draw. Over time, strong practice has become embedded in the school and this is not always shared.
- The second line of enquiry focused on leaders' actions to develop a curriculum which supports all pupils to make strong progress. Right from the start, the curriculum, its content and design has been the highest priority for leaders and governors. Leaders consider how they want pupils to learn as well as what they want them to learn about. Through this approach, pupils steadily acquire skills and knowledge. They learn to make connections between subjects, deepening their understanding over time.
- Pupils develop a genuine love of learning through a varied, purposeful and highly engaging curriculum. They enjoy the many opportunities to explore interesting themes. In Reception, as part of their study on animals, children visited a city farm. Using photographs to help with recall, they told me all about the horses eating hay and the different-sized eggs laid by different birds. Pupils in Year 1 learned about volcanoes and what makes them erupt. They experimented with colours, learning about chromatography. In Year 2, pupils made sushi, creating their own recipes. The curriculum strengthens and extends pupils' knowledge and

understanding of their own community and of the wider world. In Year 3, pupils recently completed a thematic study on society and citizenship. Through this work, they understand democracy and why laws and rules exist. They discussed Brexit with me, sharing their views on why there continued to be a debate, understanding that some people want it and others do not.

- The final line of enquiry focused on whether pupils make strong progress in writing in key stage 2. Pupils attain above-average outcomes in writing in key stage 1 and writing is a school improvement focus.
- Our visits to lessons, a scrutiny of pupils' written work and discussions with pupils show that they continue to make strong progress in key stage 2. Pupils write with greater precision and increasing knowledge of the features of different genres.
- Writing is strengthened through the early introduction of a modern foreign language, Hebrew, in Reception. Alongside regular phonics sessions, children develop confidence in speaking and listening which supports their progress in writing.
- Writing across the curriculum is a particular strength. In Reception, children recorded appointments at the vets and wrote accounts of their visit to the farm. In Year 5, pupils designed brochures to promote tourism to places of interest in Jerusalem. Pupils make good use of their information and communication technology skills to support writing, creating presentations on favourite subjects such as chocolate.
- Writing has a high profile. Regular teaching of writing gives pupils frequent and well-planned opportunities to develop writing skills and to write for a purpose. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught systematically. Pupils learn how to plan and organise their writing to create finished pieces. However, they do not always write in a neat and tidy fashion.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the distribution of roles and responsibilities across the leadership team
- they make effective use of best practice within the school so that the performance of every group matches the best
- pupils present their work to a high standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnet. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Moon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection began with a discussion about the school's self-evaluation. Three lines of enquiry were identified. I visited all classes with leaders to see teaching and learning. I spoke to pupils and asked them to show me their work in their writing and topic books. I asked pupils about their learning, about the school and about how they are helped to keep safe. I spoke to a representative from the local authority about the school's engagement. I met with senior leaders, governors and with a group of staff representative of the wider workforce. I reviewed a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, school development plan, governing body review and single central record of employment checks. I took account of responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers. I considered responses to the staff and pupil surveys.